



Chrissie Henson

- My Story

I was born in the early 70s and let's just say life decided to challenge me from the very start. The youngest of five children and a twin, my birth was anything from straightforward.

I was born six weeks premature, as my twin was delivered, I was somehow pushed upwards and my foot became trapped in my mum's ribcage, with no time for a C-section, I was pulled out with suckers and born medically dead!

After being resuscitated, it was apparent I had been starved of oxygen and had to go to the ICU. Before they could transfer me I died another eight times, due to infantile convulsions, meaning that I had technically died nine times in my first day of my life. I remained in hospital for the first two months before going home on Christmas Eve. I was only expected to reach my first birthday.

The term used back then was 'a poor start in life', and it was during a hospital visit 18 months later where my dad overheard a doctor telling a group of student doctors about the child with cerebral palsy.

This child was me, and this is how we found out and this is how we found out the name of my disability. To help me get the level of physiotherapy I required, I was sent to a special needs school at just 2.5-years-old—far too young in my opinion. How do you

form positive attachments with your mum and dad if you are at school all day?

But those kinds of things were not thought about in those days. I stayed in special needs education until I was nine—I loved it! Small classes with teachers who saw what I loved—singing and maths—and encouraged me to do well in both.



Although, I did have daily arguments with the school physio about not doing my exercises; taking me swimming every Friday was a headache for them as I did everything in my power not to get in that pool.

It was then decided that I was being 'held back' and would do better in a mainstream junior school—not that anybody had ever asked me. I was merely told before being taken to see my sister's school which I started the following year.

Whilst my strength of character held me in good stead for mainstream schooling, the number of children, the hustle and bustle, the people making fun of my disability, and losing my identity as I became the 'twin sister', NOT Chrissie, were some of the things I was not prepared for.

If having my hair pulled and being deliberately pushed over for two years wasn't bad enough for me to deal with, at home my dad had suffered a nervous breakdown and spent months in bed. I remember going to cuddle him thinking it would make him



better, like his cuddles with me always made me feel better, but sadly this was not the case.

Who could I tell about the bullying, Mum had her hands full, and Dad was too poorly. Things improved when I moved to senior school after I met a nice group of friends. There were times when other kids tried to make fun of me,

but nothing went on for too long, having a big sister in the school gave me protection.

On leaving school I decided I wanted to work with children. The careers officer gave the usual advice for people with a disability, 'get a job in a bank' —not helpful. I went to college for a year to gain a BTEC qualification in care. This was supposed to lead me into my Nursery Nursing course, but the tutors decided I wasn't capable of working with children.

They wouldn't allow me to enroll on the course. I still remember that day; the 'nice' tutor holding my hand and asking me what I was going to do instead now no one would give me a job working with children. I left college and after numerous knock backs and getting to know the 'Oh my god, you're disabled,' look on the faces of the interviewers, I got a job, and guess what? It was working with children.

I would love to say this is my happily ever after, but sadly this was where I experienced my first taste of discrimination in the



workplace. A member of staff 20 years my senior mimicked my voice in a negative way.

After it was reported and 'dealt with' (nothing happened to him), the majority of the other staff then stopped speaking to me because I had reported their friend. It was during this time I also experienced my first bereavement, my best friend from when we were five, passed away suddenly from her disability at just 21. Not only was I dealing with losing my best friend, I also had fears that I would die early from my disability.

The stress of both situations resulted in me experiencing therapy for the first time.

I eventually left that job, and had many years in different roles, some I loved, others just paid the bills. It wasn't until 2011 when I experienced discrimination at work again for my speech.

This time it was due to team members thinking my project management work was easier or better than the work they did—the 'grass must be greener' syndrome—and a manager who let the team dictate to him what work I should do. He attempted to move me to a telephone role, but this time I knew my rights.



I had been employed with the understanding that I had speech difficulties and that phone duties were very limited. I went to HR and a new 'less demanding' role was created, but it was nothing like the project management role I had loved doing.

The treatment from the team members and manager, along with issues in my private life led me to feel isolated, rejected and without purpose resulting in suicidal thoughts.

With lots of therapy and three months off work, I recovered and started to rebuild my life. I got my dog, Angel, for company during this time. I was made redundant 18 months later, it was at that point I decided I was going to become a therapist.

Again, I would love to say this was a turning point in my life but again, I experienced discrimination.

It happened when a placement supervisor stated that I should work with animals instead of people, that my disability would be too much for the clients to handle and would stop them focusing on their issues. Again, I knew my rights, and took this to management. She left her post before being asked to leave.

With all the things I have experienced, I feel I have been training to be a therapist my whole life. Happily, it enables me to support others. Since starting my private practice, I haven't experienced any other issues of discrimination and really love working with the people I meet.

I have a fantastic, supportive supervisor, who encourages me to be the therapist I want to be.

Sadly, my dad never got to see me start my own business or write this book as he passed away from cancer in 2007, but I know how proud of me he would be.

To see how I work as a therapist, and how I have supported so many amazing people over the last six years and read a little more about me in the 'About the Author' chapter in the book.



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